

A 12 Point Plan to Stay Cool Onstage

1. ***Be prepared.*** When you know that you've got your material down pat – words, music, timing, choreography, you automatically lay to rest a major source of performance anxiety. Fear of making mistakes is largely preventable. Prevent it!
2. ***Practice “visualization”.*** Research has shown that imagining a successful outcome for a performance, *before* it takes place can result in the real performance living up to the image of the mental one. In your mind's eye, *visualize* yourself on stage singing confidently and accurately, relating well to your audience. The more detailed your visualization, the better. Play this mental “tape” as often as you like. When the curtain really goes up, your mind will obligingly go to work to duplicate what has become a familiar pattern.
3. ***Learn stress-reduction techniques.*** There is a wide range of options here. The self-help section of your local bookstore or library can offer you books about yoga techniques, mental imaging, biofeedback, meditation and “relaxation/ response” training, and breathing techniques. Sample some and develop a program that works for you. Meanwhile, merely controlling your breathing – pacing yourself with regular slow, deep breaths – can have a dramatic effect on your emotional equilibrium.
4. ***Use positive thinking.*** Your mind and body function much better when you support yourself mentally, rather than chop yourself down. Affirm your abilities. Be aware of – and careful of – what some psychologists call “self-talk”. Pay attention to everything you do right, and expect to keep on doing even better. Whatever you're doing wrong will be crowded out and left behind.
5. ***Keep a journal of positive comments about your singing.*** Each time you perform, write down all the *compliments* you receive. This isn't obsessive ego-feeding (so long as you let it go to your heart, and not to your head). It's a technique for documenting your effectiveness as a performer whenever doubts start attacking your self-esteem. Write down your own positive feelings after a performance, too.
6. ***Focus on what you do best.*** Choose your music wisely. If your strongest point as a performer is your sound, showcase that in your programming. If your strengths lie in interpretation or in style, organize your performance and your selections accordingly. You'll know you are putting your best artistry forward – and that area of your thoughts will be “inoculated” against nervousness.

7. ***Don't major in minor details.*** A few missed notes, entrances, or “off” tones are just part of being a singer. Don't blow them out of proportion, mentally. You can't expect to be perfect. Just be yourself, give an honest performance, and your audience will warm to you no matter what you do.
8. ***Intend to be successful.*** Expect to succeed. When negative thoughts come to the threshold of your consciousness, close the door. Thinking about ways to fail never brought anyone closer to success.
9. ***Perform often.*** You will find that the more you perform, the easier it gets to take challenges in stride. This isn't to say you'll never feel nervous. But by broadening your experience you become better equipped to handle different situations.
10. ***Transfer negative energy into positive energy.*** When you feel the stress of performance anxiety building before a performance, turn it into a plus. Express those feelings in terms like, “I'm really excited about tonight. I can tell it's going to be a fantastic experience.”
11. ***Recognize mistakes – then let them go.*** Don't waste time agonizing over mistakes. A mistake is important only as an indicator of something that needs to be corrected. Once you've identified that, don't invest any more mental energy in the error. Put your focus on an error-free performance. Thinking about mistakes just invites more mistakes. This is especially true during a performance. Besides, if it's obvious that you attach a lot of importance to a slip-up, your audience may take its cue from you and do the same.
12. ***Be persistent.*** Don't give up. It takes time to train your voice, time to gain experience and time to build a reputation. Artistic success doesn't come overnight. You have something to say. Never quit before you've said it!